SOCIAL RESEARCH REPORTS

ISSN: 2066-6861 (print), ISSN: 2067-5941 (electronic)

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Social Research Reports, 2021, Vol. 13, Issue 1, pp. 49-57

The online version of this article can be found at:
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<https://doi.org/10.33788/srr13.1.5>

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SOCIAL DISTANCES IN A MULTIETHNIC REGION

Cătălin-George FEDOR¹

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a sociological study conducted in some multiethnic communities situated in the central area of Moldova, Romania. Its main aim was to establish the ethnic identity of Catholic population in the villages of this region and to discover the way in which these communities build their ethnic and cultural identity. We used the scale of social distance, starting from the model developed by Bogardus (1925), which has become the most frequently used method of emphasizing the acceptance or isolation of social groups. We calculated the Social Distance Index (SDI) which highlights the number of social contact opportunities rejected by the respondent, the Social Contact Index (SCI) derived from the number of social contact opportunities accepted by the respondents, and the Qualitative Index of Social Contacts (QISC). The results are focused on ethnic aspects and local features of studied communities and the conclusions reveal the methods of ethnic self-defining for each community and their tendency to conserve local identity by refusing external influences that have an ideological stake.

Keywords: social distance, ethnic community, local identity, inter-ethnic relations.

Introduction

Adequate understanding of the relationships that are established between members of various ethnic communities may be the first step towards a climate of tolerance and mutual respect, and towards preventing the emergence of possible tensions and even conflicts with identity and ideological stakes. Mutual knowledge promotes communication between ethnic groups and communities. Various stereotypes, cultural patterns, experiences and practices of ethnic communities are intertwined in this process of knowledge.

We used the Bogardus social distance scale, which conclusively illustrates the latent willingness of one ethnic group to accept or reject other ethnic groups. Consisting of a sequence of statements expressing different degrees of acceptance-rejection of the relationship with the 'other', from starting a family to expelling the 'other' from the country, the scale highlights progressively greater social

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distances in terms of attitude towards initiating a potential relationship with the representative of a different identity category.

We will further present the results obtained following a field research in a historical area of Romania where there are communities made up of members of four different ethnicities. For the interested reader, other related results have been presented by the same author in a previous paper (Fedor, 2017).

Literature review

The concept of social distance is associated with the scale that was developed and applied by Emory Bogardus (1925, 1933, 1947). This scale is still widely used to measure intergroup prejudice (Wark, Galliher, 2007). The design of research on social distance has not undergone major changes since its beginnings, which attests to the validity of the scale developed by Bogardus (Parrillo, Donoghue, 2005).

The concept of social distance is prolific and versatile. This is not a very detailed overview, but a glimpse of the usefulness of the concept showing the different ways in which it is employed. Social distance is a social construct, it is a product of the group to which it belongs, but it may also be viewed as an individual choice, so that it may be shaped according to the interests of different social agents (Leson, 2008). From the point of view of ethnic identity, the higher the identity of the primary ethnic group, the greater the social distance from the secondary groups (Driedger, Peters, 1977).

Bastian, Lusher, and Ata (2012) prove that having contact with an outgroup reduces social distance to the group in general, and highlight an alternate model for understanding contact effects and suggest that reduced social distance rather than improved outgroup evaluations may be more important in understanding minority responses to contact.

Although it has been used mostly to study interethnic relations, social distance is often associated with the race and not just with the ethnicity of members of different communities (Randall, Delbridge, 2005). However, the concept may be applied in the study of all types of communities and groups (ethnic, religious, cultural, etc.). Moreover, it is interesting that this distance may be useful as a mediator between members of minority groups and law enforcement agents in a society, and, in this regard, studies on this topic have begun to be used in public policy making (Lee, Gibbs, 2015). The concept is also interesting from the viewpoint of studies of religions or organizations, for example. Bilali, Iqbal, and Çelik (2018) examine the effects of national identity, religious identity, religious practice, and intergroup contact on social distance towards disliked groups along ethnic, religious and ideological divides, and highlight the importance of considering identity content and meaning attached to social categories in making predictions about the influence of identification with different social categories.

Rowatt and Al-Kire (2020) review the most recent empirical research about the psychology of religion and intergroup prejudices based on race/ethnicity or religious identification, and also review connections between religiosity and attitudes toward-specific cultural groups (e.g. immigrants, atheists, and religious

minority groups). They highlight how social identity fusion, intergroup emotions, perceived value-conflict and threat, and system-justification contribute to degrees of prejudice.

Jaffé, Rudert, and Greifeneder (2019) notice that organizations often state that they value diversity, but the workforce is often quite homogeneous, reflecting a striking mismatch between aspirations and reality. Based on the distinction between desirability and feasibility concerns, they provide a psychological argument for this mismatch, and hypothesize that social distance influences individuals' choices regarding diversity.

From a socio-anthropo-linguistic perspective (Wolfson, 1986; Boxer, 1993), social distance may also be reflected in the way the so-called 'speech communities' are constructed, more precisely in the discourse used by members of these groups when interacting with others. Interestingly enough, any researcher studying social distance may become themselves a subject of study (Bonnet, 2008), as distance may be built within the very interaction between the investigator and the respondents. Therefore, the reflective analysis of the interactions occurring in field research is not a mere methodological exercise, but also a means of data production.

Methodology

Thus, we propose to carry out an evaluation of the social distance in some multiethnic communities from Moldova. We conducted our research in the field in two communities of Catholics from Bacău County (Faraoani and Prăjești) and in two communities of Catholics from Neamț County (Săbăoani and Gherăești). The research undertaken has a quantitative character.

We used the scale of social distance in its form adapted by Chelcea (1994), starting from the model developed by Bogardus (1925), which has become the most frequently used method of emphasizing the acceptance or isolation of social groups.

We calculated the following indices:

- a) The Social Distance Index (SDI), which highlights the number of social contact opportunities rejected by the respondent.
- b) The Social Contact Index (SCI) derived from the number of social contact opportunities accepted by the respondents.
- c) The Qualitative Index of Social Contacts (QISC).

According to Robu (2011: 28), as far as SDI is concerned, "there are six possibilities of actual contact, ranging from the case of a person belonging to another ethnic group who is just a visitor in our country to his/her getting married in our country; in other words, it is the number of unfavorable s a participant gave to the first six items of the scale; the value of the social distance index may ranged between 0 (all possibilities of actual contact are accepted / very favorable attitudes towards people belonging to other ethnic groups) and 6 (all contact possibilities

are rejected / very unfavorable or negative attitude towards people belonging to other ethnic groups).

SCI results from the number of social contact opportunities accepted by a respondent or, more simply put, the number of favorable s to items 1-6; the value of this index may range between 0 (all actual contact possibilities are rejected / very unfavorable attitude towards other races) and 6 (all possibilities of actual contact are accepted / very favorable attitude towards other races); the value of the SCI index is obviously complementary to the SDI index value (for a batch of subjects, the correlation between the two values should be perfectly negative); in other words, $SDI + SCI$ always equal 6.

QISC is the sum the weights given to each favorable answer a respondent gives to the first six items of the scale; of course, the respondent's answer to item 7 should be unfavorable in order for the protocol to be valid.

The weights we have given to each favorable answer to items 1-6 were: Would you agree that a Romanian / Hungarian / Csango / Gypsy be in a relation of kinship with you through marriage? (7 points), Would you agree that a Romanian / Hungarian / Csango / Gypsy be in your circle of intimate friends? (6 points) ..., up to: Would you agree that a Romanian / Hungarian / Csango / Gypsy be just a visitor in Romania? (2 points). Theoretically, the QISC may range between 0 and 27.

Sample Calculation

We chose survey research as a statistical method of knowing a population based on the data recorded on a representative group (sample) extracted from that population. In our approach we preferred a "random survey by unrepeatable selection" (Fowler, 2002, 14). According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, there are 11863 inhabitants in Săbăoani and 6742 in Gherăești located in Neamț County and 2333 inhabitants in Prăjești and 5561 in Făraoani in Bacău County (<http://statistici.INSSE.RO>). So, the size of collectivity (N) for this study is made up of total population of the 4 settlements (26499 inhabitants). Taking into account the margin of error of 4.5% and using the formula for calculating the sample size, results: $n=466$ people distributed proportionally per each community.

Results and discussions

When asked about the various items referring to Romanians, Hungarians, Gypsies (Roma people) and Csangos, we noticed that most of the respondents want to become relatives with Romanians through marriage (92.1%). Also, Romanians have high scores when it comes to being close friends, so a large share of respondents said that they wanted Romanians to be in their circle of intimate friends.

Regarding the ethnic categories with which the respondents want to be neighbors on the street, a high percentage is also found for Romanians (89.9%). For the items "have them as coworkers" and "be citizens of Romania", Romanians got the highest number of affirmative answers. Although Romanians were preferred by

the respondents with regard to the aforementioned items, we noticed that Csangos came in second.

The ethnic group that has accumulated the highest number of affirmative answers as concerns the possibility of their being only visitors in Romania is represented by Hungarians (45.5%), followed by Gypsies (31.2%). Also, based on the results shown in Table 1, it can be seen that most of the people participating in the study said that they would exclude Gypsies from the country.

Table no. 1. Thinking of different ethnic groups, would you agree that they...

Adapted Bogardus scale	Romanians (%)	Hungarians (%)	Gypsies (%)	Csangos (%)
Be in a kinship relation with you through marriage	92.1%	27.6%	6.5%	31.2%
Be in your circle of intimate friends	87.2%	28.7%	6.5%	31.2%
Be your street neighbors	86.9%	36.1%	8.2%	43.5%
Be your coworkers	86.0%	37.5%	12.9%	45.7%
Be Romanian citizens	65.7%	35.4%	16.6%	38.9%
Be only visitor in Romania	10.3%	45.5%	31.2%	14.0%
I would exclude them from my country	0.7%	10.5%	62.7%	8.9%

**Source: personal data interpretation*

Below we will concisely present the most positive and negative results for each ethnic group.

Social Distance regarding Romanians

Regarding sample distribution according to the opinion that Romanians be related with them through marriage, 92.1% of the respondents included in the study said that they wanted to be related with Romanians through marriage. Depending on their gender status, 54.3% of the respondents are female and want a relationship of kinship with Romanians through marriage. 37.7% is the share of male respondents who agree to become relatives with Romanians through marriage. 5.6% of the interviewed females do not want to become relatives with Romanians through marriage. The lowest percentage concerns male respondents that do not want to become relatives with Romanians through marriage (2.4%). The processing of the data obtained from the questionnaires reveals that there is a very high percentage of people who want Romanians to become their relatives through marriage and who are Catholic (90.3%). 1.9% of the Orthodox population included in the study have the same opinion. 7.1% of Catholics do not want to enter in a relation of kinship with Romanians through marriage, as compared to only 0.7% of the Orthodox respondents.

On the other side, to the question referring to whether Romanians should be excluded from the country, a very high percentage of respondents (99.3%) said that they did not want them to be excluded from the country. The 0.7% difference is made up of people who declared that they wanted Romanians to be excluded from the country. Paradoxically, they are Romanians. 97.4% of all respondents do not want Romanians to be excluded from the country and are Romanian. The share of respondents who want Romanians to remain in their country and are Csangos is 1.9%.

Social Distance regarding Hungarians

Most people surveyed (72.4%) do not want to establish family ties with the Hungarians through marriage. However, according to a share of 27.6% among the study participants, there are also persons who would be willing to settle with the Hungarians through marriage. The results show that 43.2% of the respondents who do not want to become relatives with Hungarians through marriage are female. A share of 28.6% of all surveyed people is characterized by respondents who stated in the study that they did not want to be relatives with Hungarians through marriage and are male. However, we also found people who wanted their life partners to be Hungarian. Thus, 16.7% of the total respondents are willing to marry Hungarians and are female, as compared to only 11.5% of the men.

On the other side, we noted that most of the respondents surveyed wanted the Hungarians inside the country (89.5%). Nonetheless, there is also a share of 10.5% of respondents who want the Hungarians to be excluded from the country. From an ethnical point of view, 88.1% of all respondents are people who do not want Hungarians to be excluded from the country and are Romanian. The immediately inferior percentage is 10.0% are refers to those who want Hungarians to be excluded from the country and are Romanian. Only 1.4% of the respondents who do not want the Hungarians to be excluded from the country are Csangos.

Social Distance regarding Gypsies (Roma people)

Concerning sample distribution depending on the opinion of the respondents on whether the Gypsies should be related with them by marriage, we noticed that a very high share, i.e. 93.5% of the total study participants, do not want to become relatives with Gypsies through marriage. Only 6.5% of all respondents want to become related to Gypsies through marriage. According to the religion-based distribution, there is a very high percentage of respondents who did not agree to become related to Gypsies through marriage and are Catholic. The share of respondents who want to become relatives with Gypsies through marriage and are Catholic is 6.1%. Only 2.1% of all the study participants disagree with marrying Gypsies for establishing a degree of kinship and these are Orthodox, and 0.5% want to marry Gypsies to become related and are Orthodox. As for sample distribution concerning the idea that Gypsies be related to them by marriage, 91.6% of the Romanian respondents do not want Gypsies to become their relatives through marriage. This high percentage points to the fact that Romanians do not want to establish family ties with Gypsies through marriage. However, there is

a 6.5% share of people who said they would like to become related to Gypsies by marriage and are Romanian. As for Csangos, a higher share of them does not want to become related to Gypsies through marriage (1.7%), as compared to those who want this (0.2%).

On the other hand, the results of the questionnaire show a 62.7% share of respondents who said that they would like Gypsies to be excluded from the country, being both Romanian and Csango. But there is also a 37.3% percentage of people who said that they would not agree that Gypsies be excluded from the country.

Social Distance regarding Csangos

According to the distribution of the respondents' opinion on the idea that Csangos are in a relationship of kinship through marriage with them, it can be noticed that, regardless of their place of origin, the highest percentages stand out among those who do not want to become relatives with Csangos through marriage. 19.3% of all the surveyed respondents agreed to marry Csangos to become relatives and are women, and only 12.0% of men wanted the same thing. 30.8% of the respondents want to establish family ties with Csangos through marriage and are Catholic. 0.7% of respondents agree to become relatives of Csangos through marriage and are Orthodox. The remaining 66.6% Catholics and 1.9% Orthodox do not want family ties with Csangos. As concerns sample distribution referring to the idea that Csangos should be related to them through marriage depending on their ethnic origin, we may safely say that 68.0% of the respondents are Romanians and do not want to become related with Csangos through marriage, 30.1% of respondents are Romanian and want to marry Csangos, and 1.9% are Csangos and want to become related to Csangos through marriage.

On the other side, the respondent distribution according to their opinion on the idea that Csangos be excluded from the country shows a very high share among those who do not agree with this (91.1%). They are exclusively Romanian.

Indices: SCI, SDI, QISC

Table 2 shows the results obtained from the calculation of the representative indices for social distance. As for the Social Contact Index (SCI), the highest score reflects a better position. So, the order is as follows: Romanians, Hungarians, Csangos and Gypsies. As far as the Social Distance Index (SDI) is concerned, things are the other way around, meaning that the lowest score reflects a higher tolerance to other ethnic groups. The Qualitative Index of Social Contacts (QISC) reflects a strong positive attitude of the respondents towards Romanians, in opposition to a poorly positive one towards Gypsies.

Table no. 2. Social distance

Ethnic group	SCI	SDI	QISC
Romanians	4.29	2.71	22.21
Hungarians	2.21	4.79	11.07
Gypsies	1.44	5.54	6.45
Csangos	2.13	4.87	15.21

** Data source: personal processing*

Conclusion

We aimed to make an overview and a first evaluation from a psychosociological perspective of interethnic relations on a representative regional sample, by means of the Bogardus social distance scale. The relations between the four ethnic groups present in the communities studied by us may be understood, at a primary level, based on the results shown above.

The first conclusion that may be drawn is that ethnic identity is not only seen as a marker of members of a community, but it is also assumed on the basis of a history of active and mutually meaningful relationships with members of other communities (usually ethnic, but also confessional, cultural, etc.). The second conclusion consists in the fact that we notice an openness to otherness, a permissive pattern of the relationship with the ‘other’, but also the concretization of some prejudices, especially in relation to a particular ethnic group.

Nevertheless, we cannot disregard the possibility of a ‘hidden discrepancy’ in the structure of attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups in the communities under survey. At the declarative level, the attitude of a respondent may seem favourable, yet their actual behaviour may reflect a certain level of intolerance. This is plausible if we take into account the arguments put forward by some respondents regarding the history of their communities, on the one hand, and the external interferences with ideological stakes experienced by these communities, on the other hand. This possible inconsistency between statements and potential manifest behaviours needs further research. In other words, the quantitative results shown here should be complemented with qualitative results, for better and more nuanced knowledge of this topic.

This type of research may support the identification, description and understanding of the cohabitation of ethnic communities and of its implications on ethno-cultural diversity.

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